**How to find local support using technology**

**Sarah Botterill:** Okay. So just give it a few more minutes and wait for everybody to join us and then we'll make a start.

Welcome everybody to AbilityNet Live! Today we are going to be looking at how to find local support if you need it. One of the things that's been really nice to see at this time is how communities are really pulling together to offer local support in this time of crisis.

Today's focus is going to be looking at how you can actually find that support using the internet…to find that way you can get support either for yourself if you're an older person, if you're disabled or it might be for somebody else.

We've already received an email this morning from somebody, looking for some support for her mum who needs support and she's currently unable to provide it.

So that's what we're going to be looking at today.

And with that in mind, it's amazing to be doing by so many other fantastic charities today. We are being joined today by COVID-19 Aid UK, which has set up a website specifically looking at where people can find some of their local support groups that are springing up.

And we're also being joined by Age UK who are very much responding, offering people local support and at a national level.

Similarly, we're joined by the British red cross, RNIB, and the stroke association. And we are also joined by Mick Trott, who is going to be talking to his later about his book, Staying Put, and how you can find support with finding those elusive online shopping slots.

So that's the focus for today.

As I said, we're going to be looking at how to find local support using technology.

We will be talking to the individual charities. We'll be looking at how you can find support using, um, Facebook groups; support from Age UK at a local and national level, help from British Red Cross, and as I said, how to access government support during COVID-19.

So a little bit of housekeeping.

My colleague Mark is monitoring the Q and a box, as he said. If we could, um, any questions that you've got in the Q and a window and we're going to keep the chat window for ourselves, just for any kind of tech issues that come up during the call today.

So that would be great. If you've got other questions, please do use the Q and A.

And we'll be having some time at the end for the specific charities to, um, answer some questions. After the webinar, you'll be able to access a recording and we will be asking you any feedback about the webinar and later as well.

Hopefully everybody is also seeing live captions, which are available during the webinar.

So Rees, can you introduce yourself? If you want to take yourself off mute.

I'm so really delighted today to be joined by Rees Arnott Davies, who is joining us from COVID-19 Mutual Aid UK. On the screen we have a screenshot of the website, which has got the search box to find your local group.

Rees, tell us a little bit more about the website and how it can help you. Can you just give us a brief overview of COVID-19 Mutual Aid UK.

**Rees Arnott Davies, COVID-19 Mutual Aid UK:** Oh, of course. Thanks for inviting me today. I look forward to hearing from your many attendees. Um, so COVID-19 Mutual Aid UK., we're not a charity, first of all.

We didn't exist three weeks ago. What happened effectively is some of us started a group in our local area. Like for me, it was a street I live on in South London. I tried to offer support to people who were being asked to self-isolate for the 12 week period in particular. But anybody who, who felt they needed help in staying away from busy shops and getting medical support and getting that prescriptions brought to them.

The website was kind of the solution to that problem. It's got loads of resources on it for people who want to set up local groups to support their local neighborhoods.

But it also has a search function, which you can, uh, you saw a screenshot of earlier and you can see another kind of screenshot of, um, on the right of the slide.

All you have to do that is put in your local area, whether that's your post code or your address, or you know, just the name of your local town or village. And it will bring up a map detailing all the local groups on a list of the different groups and how to contact them.

Most groups function on Facebook or with a website or email address.

So if you have issues, like say accessing any of those, you can also email us directly and we can put you in contact with an admin or local group. So that's basically how the website works. It's a place for us to like help you find the support you need locally.

It's nothing more than that.

It's a, it's a tool, I guess you could say.

**Sarah Botterill, Marketing Manager Free Services for AbilityNet:** And how did you pull the website together? How is it bringing together all that information in one place? Say a little bit about that.

**Rees Arnott Davies, COVID-19 Mutual Aid UK:** Well, it kind of happened accidentally. I would say, like, I was a library assistant, um, three weeks ago. The library isn't open anymore, so I've got a bit more time. What happened is we started the local group for Lewisham. Lots of people want it to do something similar.

They started joining the Lewisham group, which presented problems for us because the Lewisham group then became a place where people were asking for how to set up their own group rather than asking for help within the local area.

So we decided a kind of like national umbrella website would be the best way forward for that, and we just started producing materials.

We try not to offer medical advice, but all the medical advice we do offer is checked over by, government epidemiologists and by doctors, by nurses, by healthcare experts. And we tried to stay as up to date as possible with the medical guidelines that are coming out of the same real time at the moment.

**Sarah Botterill:** What sort of support are people accessing?

**Rees Arnott Davies:** That's a good question. Um, so I live. Well, I live in, in my local area, obviously, and where I am, the stuff that I'm doing is a mixture of the local pharmacy got in contact because they weren't able to deliver prescriptions to people who were isolating.

So now we're delivering prescriptions for the local pharmacies, which means that people are getting their prescriptions almost as soon as they're coming in.

Cause there's a lot of support, a lot of people volunteering.

Um, there's two local residents who I provide shopping with on a weekly basis who are both they both got the shielding letter from the NHS, so they're at high risk.

Besides that, I've seen a lot of dog walking, um, people taking each other's bins out. Um, also just a phone line, you know, you can call someone and they'll be on the other end to help pick up and talk to you. Um, to give you advice or to just be a friendly ear.

Every community decides what is most helpful for them. So like, I live in a city, but in the countryside there's very different issues that might come about from, for example, living in a food desert where you don't have a local shop nearby. So someone with a car will go and pick up a large amount of food and deliver it around to people within a village.

Um, so it really does depend what is helpful for you, and within reason, like we tried to just like match any requests that comes in because yeah, like we realized it's a difficult, exceptional time.

I'm like, you know, the best way we can get through this side of things is with communities coming together and supporting each other, and that's kind of been proven so far.

**Sarah Botterill:** Brilliant. Um, and just to reiterate, it's a fantastic resource. Can you just go through again, how somebody can actually find the support that they need at a local level using that search box?

**Rees Arnott Davies:** Of course. Yes. So this search box here, which I think you can see on the right, you literally just put it in your local area. It could be either the name of the area, it could be the name of a town of a street. Um, it could be a postcode, postcode is generally most accurate. Um, see, you type that in, you click search, then it will bring up a map of your local area. And so you can find within that local area though, so where I am, there's like four or five different groups and you can decide which one matches your needs most closely.

Some will be for example people who are homeless in the local area.

So if you have housing issues, you can go and contact that group and they can help you deal with that. Others would just be a catchall group for the local borough or for the local County.

Some will be a group just for a street or even for half a street.

Um, and generally what happens then is you'll be given a link to a Facebook page or to a website or sometimes to a WhatsApp group as well. If you have WhatsApp. You can use that to join the local group. And from there, uh, you can make a request or you can offer to fulfill a request if you, if you have the ability to help someone.

So it's really straightforward with that; if anything doesn't seem clear, there's an email address on our website and we have someone answering the emails the whole time.

We give top priority to people who are emailing, asking for help.

So we tried to answer those [queries] within an hour, and so if you just can't find the local group where you're having trouble navigating the website, we can walk you through that.

We can give you a phone call and we can put you directly in contact with someone in your local area.

**Sarah Botterill:** That's fantastic. Thanks so much for going through that. I think it's a brilliant resource, and as I say, it's already helped somebody who's joined the webinar this morning, um, to get that localized support.

So, um, thanks so much for talking us through that.

This is just a slide for me just to flag up, as you've mentioned quite a lot of the Facebook Groups have already registered with yourself, but Facebook is an alternative way of finding a local support group.

I've also joined mine to volunteer, but also it's a great source of information.

So if you are on Facebook, a really easy way to find the local groups is just go into the search box at the top and type the name of where you live.

I've just put in Hassocks because that's where I live.

It instantly brought up, if you see this, you can see the second one down on the screenshot that I've taken is the Hassocks COVID-19 group, which is quite active.

It's a great resource for me in terms of finding out, where to get local things from shops and things that are still open and offering resources there. So if you have a Facebook account is a great way to find a local or community support group as say, just typing at the search box, and to the name of the place you live. And you should get a list of groups.

And again, they're quite descriptive in terms of the type of support that they are.

And once you've been accepted, you can just pop a message in there.

So that's an alternative way of finding support for yourself or for somebody else who needs it as well. Um. So, yeah, different way of doing it is you can click the Groups at the top of the page on Facebook, and that should reveal all the local groups related to your search.

Once you've found a local group, you usually need to click the join button and just wait for that requests to join the group to be approved, and then it will just pop up in the list of groups that on the left hand side of your news feed, and then from there you'll just be able to follow the local messages that go in there.

So that's two resources in terms of finding local support using those kind of like overarching sites there. So hopefully that's helpful.

So, I'm gonna pass over to Alison now from Age UK….

**Rees Arnott Davies:** Before we finish, can I just speak to the issue of privacy and security, which I know is like a concern. It's also a massive concern for us. So the resources we put out to local groups explain the best way to secure that information.

One of the things is any data that you give us, so that would be an email address, a phone number or an address, anything like that, the moment that your request has been fulfilled and you don't need any more support, that information is deleted.

So it won't be kept on a database for you for like, for any longer than it has to.

Um, secondly, we ensure that, like, everyone who is like getting involved, every neighbor who like goes and helps someone, they're very clear that they don't go inside someone's house. That's both to ensure like the minimal chance of spreading any kind of disease, but also, uh, to ensure that there's no risk of anything uncomfortable.

So if someone's trying to come into your house, they're not following the procedure and you know, you shouldn't trust them.

I feel confident about that.

Finally, with money where making it very clear to groups that they don't take payment until they've already made a purchase for someone, and secondly, the payment should be made as much as possible using a computer like via an online banking system…if that's not possible, they can take cash or even just, um, agree credit.

Also, some groups have set up, um, benefit funds.

So if people aren't able to access their money currently, which I think is a real issue, particularly a lot of the post offices closing down….a lot of groups are able to offer, you know, food for free basically. Um, so yeah, like any security issue, like please ask a question in the chat and I can try and answer it as well.

**Sarah Botterill:** Thanks. Important point there. So Alison, are you there? Just pop yourself off mute…. So [we are] delighted to be joined by Alison Ingram from age UK.

So, um, this is, um, a screenshot from their website, which just shows it as with many of the sites coronavirus or COVID-19 support is front and center there. So we'll be writing up all the links at the end, but you shouldn't find any problem at all finding the specific advice relating to COVID-19 so tell me about your role at Age UK….

**Alison Ingram, Age UK:** So, well, first of all, thanks for having me today, Sarah. It's great to be part of this is to encourage them to see so much work being done by lots of different organizations on this. I'm the head of wellbeing at Age UK.

I work for the national organization, so we are one charity, but a lot of my work is focused on supporting our local Age UK partners.

So we've got 130 local groups across England, and we also have sister charities in the other nations, so in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

So I do a lot of work focused on how we support them.

**Sarah Botterill:** Brilliant. That's great. Um, and, uh, this is quite a big question, but what are you guys doing to, um, respond to the pandemic? Perhaps you could talk us through some of the main initiatives and helping people at this difficult time.

**Alison Ingram, Age UK:** I'll give you a bit of a summary cause there's quite a lot going on. As you can imagine, you know, it's a charity focusing our support on older people. This is a really busy time for us and we're trying to make sure we're doing everything we can to support older people.

Um, both those in the shielded group and those who aren't.

I think there's a lot of confusion of it. Who got a letter and who didn't and how that's working with the supermarkets. So one of the main roles that we've been playing is providing really clear up-to-date information for older people.

So on the website you've helpfully shared what we've got on there, Sarah.

We’ve seen the number of unique users on the website go up by about 50% in recent weeks. There's obviously a huge demand for that information.

And we've also developed a Corona virus booklet, which is available in hard copy and online.

I'm really conscious that for a lot of the older people that we work with, many of them aren't online or if they are online, aren't super competent with it. It's really important that we've got the hard copy and telephone information in addition to the online.

Um, well, if the things are, is a real proliferation of spams.

There were a lot of people trying to take advantage of older people at this time.

We want to make sure that whenever we're sharing information is pretty clear that has come from us, and you know, as mentioned, just making sure no one's kind of overstepping boundaries, information is being shared appropriately.

So that's a big area.

Just trying to cut through some of the myths, and make sure people have got the right information. In addition to the online information, in the hard copy stuff, we have our helplines.

Age UK Advice provides information as a free phone number that anyone can call.

We also have the Silverline which is a loneliness-based service. People can ring up for a chat and it'll be a lot of older people are more isolated than they even, they were before. Um, so that service has really seen a spike in calls.

Um, we also have our Call in Time service, which is a befriending opportunity where older people get matched with a volunteer who calls them once a week for half an hour, and it's the same person they see every week.

All of those services have seen a huge increase, I think calls were up 88%.

So we're, we're kind of just trying to do everything we can to make sure you can visit that.

That's a challenge locally. Then there's lots of stuff being done in a really amazing way by the local. She came at work, so they're looking at access to food, something that's coming up again and again. Older people perhaps enables to do online shopping because they have existing conditions that mean they can't get out or they've been advised for their home.

And so that's a big challenge for lots of people. Trying to find ways around that. Um, that can be in relation to purchasing food. So it could be actually just help them do the online order. I could also be deliveries. I'm trying to coordinate all of that locally along with the medicine, um, deliveries as well.

So it's another aspect of that. Also just trying to keep people moving so we know that older people, if they're sick. Well, any of us, actually, if we're still for a long period of time, we lose muscle mass very quickly, and a lot of people were very sedentary at this time on.

There's a huge concern that there will be a massive increase in falls.

So older people here at home who perhaps are used to being able to do normal everyday activities because they're sitting down much more.

Will become weaker like all of us, and therefore we need to try and keep people moving.

So there's a lot of work being done around online, physical activity kind of sessions, but also we're trying to get hard copy information, out to older people as well.

I was trying to convince them to move at home by themselves, even if they can't get online. So there are lots of different issues that we're, we're trying to support older people with.

And the demand is, is ever growing at the moment, as you can imagine.

**Sarah Botterill:** There's a lot going on then. It sounds like it's a mixture of providing that advice and as you say, in a hard copy form providing information online for people and a mixture of that sort of practical support that you're giving, but also some of the emotional and mental support that we've heard so much about, in terms of just having somebody to have a chat with you for half an hour every week, if you're on your own and you're feeling a bit lonely.

**Alison Ingram:** Yeah, absolutely. I think, um, the loneliness angle is huge and the fact that people's regular structures and systems have been completely disrupted means that they are very, very isolated at the moment. But there's some really creative stuff happening. I think we should all be encouraged by that. We've heard of older people who have been running their regular book club by telephone instead of meeting.

So there are, people are finding ways around it and there's, we see a lot of interaction through windows, which is sort of, you know, it's kind of heartbreaking that people can't touch each other and hug and, you know, whole times, but that is actually quite a key kind of points of contact for lots of older people.

And also letter writing.

So there's been a lot of people, you know, sending cards, writing stories drawing pictures, sending to older people in their area.

So trying to make the most of what we can do, I think is, is really important because we don't want to just focus on what the issues are and what the barriers are.

Yeah. And I think that's great. And technology can help, um, with a lot of this stuff.

**Sarah Botterill:** And in terms of the letter writing, actually, so I just was looking at the Touch Note app that you can have on your phone, and without even going to the post office, you can create like a postcard with a picture on it, and you can just send them [if you] sign up for some credits and things, but you can just load it out with 10 pounds on there I think, and then I can just send some postcards to my family just to say, hi, how are you doing?

And it's just lovely to get that bit of communication, isn't it? From the outside world. I think.

**Alison Ingram:** Yeah, definitely. And I've seen I think they're called Kudo Boards, where people can post lots of different messages, like, you know, if it's a get well soon situation, trying to encourage someone in that way is really a kind of helpful point of contact for them.

Have we covered everything? Is there anything else you wanted to share in terms of like big successes or anything, any other ways that tech helping you during this time?

Alison Ingram: In terms of tech, we've completely kind of transformed, how we’re operating as a business, as many of you will have done in terms of working from home and keeping in touch, which has been great and much needed actually.

 I think in terms of how we're using tech to contact older people, one area that we're really keen to focus on is the older people who are not online or perhaps use WhatsApp, but don't even realize that's online and trying to help them either use their device more effectively or get devices to people who have not been online with very, very detailed instructions trying to explain to them what they need to do alongside helpline.

So we're looking to post tablets out to older people who've potentially never been online, um, with very, very detailed instructions and we're going to see how that goes.

[00:27:17] I think it will be difficult. I mean, I can imagine for myself, if I'd never been online and I was presented with the kind of black triangle and pages and pages of instructions, that would be quite intimidating. But. I think it's worth trying because there are some people who have no other way of trying to engage the outside world. So we're going to see how that goes. Um, we are really interested to know if anyone has any experience in that kind of area but that's one thing that we are really trying to look at. Also just connecting people online. You know, if anyone does have an email address and they have be in touch with us, trying to make sure that they're linked up with other things that are happening and trying to expand people's view of what they can do online is really important because we know there are a lot of people who perhaps have a specific kind of a reason that they go, you know, they go to check their emails and they look at the BBC website and that's all they ever do.

So trying to help them explore what else they can do in a safe way where they feel supported is one of the key areas that we're looking at. You know, how can we use digital champions. By telephone rather than the usual face to face model. I've also seen some families where they've done some work through the windows of the home, so where one person has had a device on one side and they're on the other.

There's lots of creative stuff going on. Um, and technology is definitely, you know, a key part of all of that.

**Sarah Botterill:** Brilliant. Thank you, and uh, at the end of the presentation, we'll also be sharing our own AbilityNet information. Our helpline is open business as usual, and we are, very able and willing to provide that support for people who are either getting to grips with technology for the first time or needing any specific help in terms of making more of that or any specific accessibility challenges that they've got. We'll round all that information up at the end as well. So that's fantastic. Thank you.

Amanda, I know you had been waiting patiently in the wings if you can just unmute yourself and we'll talk about what The British Red Cross is doing in this area. So again, I've added a screenshot from the home page of the British Red Cross. Support around this [Covid-19] is front and center. Um, mentioned your kindness manifesto.

So same question, if you'd like to tell us your role at the British Red Cross and then tell us a little bit about how you're responding to the pandemic for anyone who needs help.

**Amanda Palin, British Red Cross:** Okay. Thank you for inviting me, Sarah. I can give you a little bit more information about what the Red Cross is doing. Communities are all coming together and all charities coming together so I think that's very, very positive.

My role at the British Red Cross is the business and partnership development manager I’ve been within that role almost two years now. So, the British Red Cross has the kindness manifesto, which we launched leading on from our promotion around trapped in a bubble…. work that we did for social isolation.

And I think what's very, very clear is that the current pandemic is creating lots of social isolation and lots of loneliness. And we've found that as well as the people that we support also for us staff who are shielded and our volunteers, they too, are lonely and isolated.

You know, the slide that you put on is the Hope is a coloring book, an activity book, which we give out to people on it is quite useful. And it is a hard copy because as colleagues have said, every person has got it availability, and we've certainly found with our refugee, um, support that we did. It's fine for people to go out into libraries and cafes when, when they have got unsecure status and those cafes and libraries are closed now, so that also increases their isolation too.

And so the red cross is linking in with NHS partners to support home from hospital.

We are linked in with the Daily Mirror and there's some nice stories and some nice and positive stories because I think throughout this positivity will get us through kindness will get us through. And I think, you know, it is a challenging time, but as communities we are doing everything we possibly can to support.

So some of the biggest challenges for the Red Cross is it's responding to the requests.

You know, where we are having a lot of requests from people who pick up the phone and ask for help…we've been fortunate to, to signpost people to, COVID-19 [Mutual Aid UK] to other partners; linking in to some of the community hubs and the local authority hubs, we don't have all the information. I don't think anyone's an expert in this, what the connectivity is by. We can be a small part of, then it helps people to get through.

Technology for me is, is really important we, it connects it links and is vital. And I think for the biggest success for the Red Cross is that look for volunteers and staff have responded quickly with a desire to make things different? And to improve things for everyone, or connections with food banks or connections with local authorities. I’m, really, really humbling and positive. Um, and something that, you know, you can be incredibly proud of to reflect and look back and say, as a community, we all did incredibly well very difficult times.

**Sarah Botterill:** In terms of connectivity…that's almost why the internet was invented in the first place, isn't it? You know, that shrinking and the global society. Um, and I think, you know, a lot of today's webinars come about through making these connections digitally, and lots of signposting which is what we're hoping that today will be all about.

So, there’s your home page there, and I know there's lots of links from there as well as you say, to COVID-19 information to others who are providing that help. Um, so I would just bring up some of those good news stories for you, which you kindly sent across. Just talk us through how you're pulling these together and sharing them out.

**[Shows picture from The Daily Mirror of a news spread of positive news stories]**

The bottom one….and we do have permission from the person for this [is] one of our assisted discharge services this gentleman unfortunately has a terminal diagnosis and it was important for him to write a letter to his partner. So with social distance. And that was something that we managed to do and that was important to him, his partner read, uh, and even though it wasn't going to collect some shopping or a prescription for this gentleman, it was bike to get that last love letter written down.

And that was something that we supported him to do.

And we've been very fortunate, you know, quite a few of the large organizations have contact to, and you know, the flowers, are presented and donated and they make a difference to our NHS and also to people we support in the community.

So I think the kindness manifest isn't just the red crosses; it's the whole community at the minute. We're very fortunate to be able to support.

**Sarah Botterill:** That's brilliant. Thank you. So again, it's that, make sure if the practical support that's all coming together and some of the sort of acts of kindness and the mental health side of things.

So. I'll ask you to put yourself back on mute if you don't mind.

**[Poll 1: asked whether people have received support from a local community support group simple yes/no answer].**

**Sarah Botterill:** So what we can see here is that 78% people are saying that they haven't received that support, and 22% have, which I guess I'm just curious about, I don't know whether that's because…I'm hoping that the people who need the support are finding that support out there, and if not genuinely hope that this webinar signpost people to where they can find that information and that support if they need it.

So, um, I will just end the poll.

**Gary Brunskill, RNIB:** Hi, Sarah. Hi there. Hi. How are you doing?

Perhaps you’d just like to introduce yourself and tell us a bit more about your role at RNIB, and then similarly what you're doing in terms of responding to the pandemic.

**Gary Brunskill, RNIB:** Yeah, of course. Thank you, Sarah. And everyone for inviting me to be part as well. I'm actually really amazed listening as well, so I've been listening intently to some of the, presentations there and fantastic stuff that I've been hearing. Um, so my role at RNIB is the lead within specialist services, specifically around assistive technology and digital inclusion. So myself and my team focus mainly on four areas, which is around supporting people with low vision or sight loss to make the most of technology and devices and online services through a range of a range of channels, really, from information advice as telephone support, through to, deployment of volunteers locally.

We run a program as well to allow people to access the technology and devices that they would need to maintain independence through…getting hold of…I'll forget the hands on equipment that they would need. What we’re doing, so in general, we've got, we've got lots and lots going on.

Our services are still very much running. Our helpline is open. We're seeing a huge amount of calls into our helpline. It remains open as usual, usual hours, eight to eight on weekdays, and we've extended our Saturday operation as well. So our staff have been fantastic. We've moved to homework and like as mentioned earlier, lots and lots of people would've been doing that at the moment. So, massive effort from our it team as well to move all of our staff to work. And so we have the first week or so of adjusting, but now we are fully up and running, and that team is operating in the usual amount of manner, offering advice, poor guidance, information about sight loss, um, or a whole range of services and information.

And we're also doing a lot more online as well. So, Facebook groups. We have the Facebook group for each regional area. So that's the, the nine UK regions in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland. Um, and, uh, advisors are being much more active on those groups and stimulate in discussion and, um, connecting people to the right information. Useful tips, hints, um, things that people can, get up to whilst being at home.

Um, and, and sharing, developing conversations across the community. With a slight loss. I'm so sorry. The eye clinic team, um, obviously hospital eye care services have been affected. Um, so the eye clinic liaison officers, which we have at RNIB are predominantly based in, uh, as in eye clinics and, uh, there to offer support, uh, information and emotional, uh, support, uh, to people in, in eye clinics. They are home-based and delivering that support remotely, and also doing a number of checks and support calls into some of our current client base as well.

It has been fantastic to be able to move those guys onto that, on to, uh, a remote platform so that they can continue to do that work.

Um, obviously our products and shop are still running and we're still saying a lot of, um, product purchases and things for people to specify, specifically around reading, um, devices, um, ways in which people can still access written material I've, uh, audio digitally. Um, so we are, uh, we've seen a lot more, uh, increase around that. People can still purchase those, those, those devices through the shop, but we've also changed the way in which we can, we're allowing people to access those books and those reading materials.

So the newsagent program we offer, which is, um, large print and braille versions of, uh, newspapers and magazines. So that's national newspapers as well as more specific interests, newspapers of that. They moved online and digitally. Being able to access that digitally. And, obviously the, the support around that, about accessing that has been, has been underpinned by my team of, of, of technology advisors who have been supporting people with, um, okay.

Remotely being able to get set up and use those, those types of devices. That's great. And there's a lot of devices, as you say, out there, that can actually help people with sight loss to access and use the technology and to maintain that connection.

**Sarah Botterill:** And again, as I'm sure you're aware, it's an area that AbilityNet is also very active in, in terms of providing information support online or through the helpline; support for people who, who just want to know how to make better use of those tools.

So we're very willing to help with that as well.

**Gary Brunskill, RNIB:** Yeah, we've worked together for a long time, so, so, um, the guys in my team know the, the AbilityNet guys really well, and there's some, some of the queries are transferred and supported across both, both elements of the services.

**Sarah Botterill:** I wondered if we could come on and talk about the specific example that we mentioned in terms of the way that technology is supporting. If you're able to just talk us through **Be My Eyes**.

**Gary Brunskill:** Yeah, absolutely. I also just wanted to mention as well, I think whilst people have been isolated, we've seen a lot more calls relating to the, the way in which people read and can access the information. We've been able to change the way we were able to manage them and spend more time with people and have more quality conversations, um, rather than a call back to spend more time because we've had more advisors available. We'll be able to, to answer those queries first time. So that's a real positive for us from, from all of this. Yes.

Just going on to Be My Eyes. So we've, um, just last week launched, um, a relationship with the Be My Eyes app, which is a, uh, free mobile app, um, for anyone, uh, with, um, with sight loss or low vision. And that will connect to someone with some useful vision at the other end of a smart phone.

Now, there are, there are over 3 million volunteers worldwide registered on the app, and it it's a global platform, but in the UK, we've just signed up as alongside some of the larger companies like Microsoft, Google, Lloyd's bank, Halifax, Clear Blue to be able to offer specialist help for people with low vision.

So. effectively connect to a volunteer if it's a regular, query, something like, could you just, explain to me, is this a tin of beans or is this a spaghetti hoops? Or what color is my tie? Does it match this shirt? Through the app, a person they've connected to would be able to offer that advice.

However, with specialist help, we're able to support people with specific inquiries relating to RNIB products or services. So for example, they may have a problem with setting up a talking watch or being able to navigate, um, some of the buttons on one of the new products.

So we were able to connect via smartphone now and, um, uh, a direct video link to be able to help that person remotely. It’s a really new platform and we're really excited to see how it goes we’re the first sight loss charity to sign up in the UK. We're very, very excited and we'll be, we'll be sharing out some messages, um, on our website very soon.

One of the thing we've been doing on our website, and I encourage people to go and check out, is some of we've been doing reviews on specific apps and platform of a platforms as well. Obviously be my eyes is one, but we've done some reviews around things like Next Door, Be on Hand [and] Close at hand. They have very similar names, but platforms and applications people can connect to local communities in testing them, uh, for accessibility, and how someone might be able to use that from a low vision perspective. So the reviews are up on our website and we'll be putting out a few more week by week now.

**Sarah Botterill:** That's great. And we can definitely share some links to that information. And I know my colleague is keeping a list of things, useful, things that come up during the call and we'll share that afterwards, so that's fantastic. Thanks so much, Gary. So just move on to find out a little bit about what the Stroke Association is doing during this time.

Nic, are you there?

**Nic Mooney, The Stoke Association:** Yep. I'm here.

**Sarah Botterill:** Hi Nic. Thanks for joining us. So, um, as before I’ve got a screenshot here of the Stroke Association and a message about in being closer than ever. It's a crisis for everybody, but you know, it's about communities and charities and organizations coming together.

So, Nic, just tell us quickly about your role at the Stroke Association and, and what you're doing in terms of helping your clients respond during this difficult time.

**Nic Mooney:** Yeah, absolutely. My job title is volunteer training and development officer. I am particularly focused on working with our volunteers at a national level who run 220 volunteer led groups across the UK.

Most of them are led by stroke survivors, and they're about connecting to stroke survivors. And I look at the community across the organization. We're doing loads of different things like on our website, one of the key things is access to information. So, we had a lot of people asking those, you know, I've had a stroke. What does that mean in terms of my risk so we’ve been checking that information with clinicians and putting it into an accessible format so that everyone who's had a stroke can understand that information.

We have completely transformed how we deliver or regular services. So, what used to be going out to visit people in their homes obviously can't happen. So we're doing that by phone and by Skype to make sure we're still there to provide support to people who've had a stroke and, but also exploring with the NHS how we can support in areas where we don't have therapies.

We have a help line but like all helplines during this time it has had a lot more calls recently with people with to know that, where to get information. So we've increased the capacity there to make sure we are able to respond to people quickly and we are able to, you know, have the time for people and have the time to chat to people.

We've also got My Stoke Guide, which is an online platform for access and information and online community about stroke, and again, we're putting more capacity in there. Some of our staff are going to be available on there… we have a befriender service and people can phone up and be matched to a volunteer beforehand and chat to them.

You will be matched with someone who may have had a stroke themselves but definitely will understand a lot about stroke.

We're working really hard with volunteer groups and with groups affiliated with us about how can they connect online; how can they keep this sort of connection going with their local community when they can’t meet face-to-face.

**Sarah Botterill:** So yeah. Yes. It's been quite big transition for you guys, I think, hasn't it? Because you do provide that kind of like local face to face community support. You've had to quite quickly adapt to that online space. As you say, My Stroke Guide existed already, and that is a great resource for people because you've got the forums, they can chat to other people, and that continues, doesn't it? And as you say, your own people will be in there responding to questions that people have as well.

**Nic Mooney:** Yeah, absolutely. And, and you know, My Stroke Guide was designed with Stroke Survivors so it was designed to be really accessible and have lots of different flexible options to make it as usable as possible to people who may not be the most confident with technology.

And, you know, our volunteer led groups have been. Really amazing. You know, if I had a lot of examples of them using technology to meet in different ways and being, you know, really think about what works. You know, we've had choirs that have been meeting on zoom, so you know, they've been continuing to sing along with each other on them, which has been amazing and brought a real joy to people, which is so important for mental health right now.

You know, we've had some are volunteers, you know, took to email older members. So that's a bit of connection with someone they already know.

We've had a coffee morning that has taken place on Facebook Messenger. So there's loads of lovely examples starting to happen already where people are using technology to keep connected.

**Sarah Botterill:** That's fantastic. I'm going to look into the choir afterwards. It sounds amazing. Thank you. You've very kindly listed some links here. I'm not gonna read them all out now, but there is a link here to My Stroke Guide, and as you say, the clubs are trying to keep themselves going using technology. I’m also signposting to the joint webinar that we did with you guys quite recently as well, because we shared a bit more detailed information during that about My Stroke Guide. If people want to find out a bit more information and a bit more about you guys, they can go and watch that again.

So the slides just to reiterate, will be made available after the call, everyone will receive an email, and you'll just be able to go through and pick out any relevant contacts at your leisure. I will just come on to our second poll.

This is just to find out if people do have a specific disability or impairment, if you're comfortable to answer this question. No obligation, obviously. So we've got a range from, I don't have an impairment, hearing or speech and parent impairment. Um, neurodiverse issues, memory issues, mental health. We've talked about quite a lot already today, so it would be good to just hear about the type of help that you need there.

Um, just give it a couple more seconds. It's like it's settling down.

Okay. So, um, I'm just going to end the poll and share the results with everybody. So we can see here that 64% of people are saying that they don't have an impairment. We've got 17% of people who've got mobility issues, quite a lot coming up around mental health 5% in terms of vision and colour perception there as well. So interesting results.

And so, I will just move on. And so Mick…Can you give us a brief overview of your book and why you wrote it? It rounds up lots of useful information, which we haven't got time to go into today, but we will share the link to your website afterwards.

Michael Trott: Author of Staying Put: “First can I say, if anybody wants a free copy, it's free today on Amazon, you can only make things free on Amazon for a little while. So grab one there. I wrote, Staying Put last year before this happened and it was based partly on the experience of helping my own parents through the care situation then into a care home.

And I've found out lots of things. Some of them were really positive, and some of them were quite shocking. So I put them together and published this in December, um, turned around enough to Christmas to find that staying put was no longer a choice for those of us over 60. We will some of the first that were told to stay at home for 12 weeks, and we've all found ourselves in that situation being in a sort of 70 plus.

So I updated the, um, the book with, I hope it was useful information and decided to make it free. The actual cover is free on the internet, but you can get the whole book anyway.

So if you go to stayhomewise dot info, you can find details of. The appendix.

**Sarah Botterill:** That's great. And it touches on a lot of thing. I just wanted to mention that it touches on a lot of the future webinars that we're planning. You've talked a little bit in that as some great tips in terms of staying safe online, and that's something that we'll be running, a specific webinar on in a couple of weeks with an expert, and lots of the things that you've picked up on, we'll be covering in terms of entertainment and how people can keep themselves… I know we're talking about saying physically active, but also how people can stay mentally active during this time and with the information you've shared is, is, is very, very practical.

So I just want to move on to the next slide and, and just flag this up with people. So I know you've flagged this up

**Mick Trott:** I'm a bit disappointed with it when I first put the link up that was the distinct impression that anybody who had been advised to, um, stay at home - those over 70 plus without risk could register, but I think you'll find it's now refers to the shielded group. So, those of us who are sort of fit and healthy, won't get on a grocery list, so to speak, as far as I can say. So the shielded group will be able to get a slot. If you're over 70, it doesn't necessarily mean that you will be able to.

**Alison Ingram, Age UK:** So we've been doing some work with the supermarket trying to influence them to understand a bit more broadly some of the issues that are going on and they are listening, but it's a slow process. One area that they have been receptive of is trying to ensure that any volunteers or carers who are shopping for an older person or someone else who needs support can get into the supermarket during the priority slots.

And also that they might be able to have more than the upper limit of the restricted items, because if they're shopping for more than one person, sometimes they need to buy more. Um, those conversations are ongoing and they seem open to those possibilities.

But I think the practicalities of it can sometimes be difficult. You know, the supermarkets have so many branches and trying to get all the staff aware of the issues and Mick is completely correct in what he says.

**Sarah Botterill:** I think if people are struggling, they can also get in touch with their local GP as well, and maybe get them to try and help a little bit. So this will be, again, shared. We know that it's not a perfect system, but hopefully that signposting will help people.

**Mick Trott:** If you are in that group, get there and get registered. A lot of the people that have joined us today, we're, I'm sure fall into that category, so to speak. They have actually published the algorithm they use on the website.

**Sarah Botterill:** I'm just going to launch the final poll for people just to find out if people have been able to take advantage of this. I've just launched the poll now to see whether people have registered using the government website already, either for yourself or for someone else. I know anecdotally quite a lot of people have been doing it on behalf of others who've perhaps less IT literate and getting them signed up just so that they can try and get some online deliveries here.

So, um, I'm just give it a few more seconds to see whether people have registered or not.

So I'm just going to end the poll. So vast majority haven't, and it may be that that's because people are not falling within the shielded group. We can see that 92% of people haven't registered as vulnerable. Hopefully we've just raised a bit of awareness about that today.

So I'm very conscious of time, but we've had lots of people join, um, in terms of different charities today, and there's been quite a lot to get through.

So there was some other contacts, which might be useful here. We've been working really closely with some carers’ organizations as well. That whole thing about caring for somebody when you're physically distanced is something that has been a real challenge, and there's a recording of the webinar that we ran, um, last week, which people can find more information at that as well.

We are running these webinars weekly where we can.

We'll be covering things like staying safe online.

Our helpline is available for people who need help with specific tech issues.

And so we'll share all these details afterwards and you can find details of future webinars and through the link here.

**Mick Trott:** I’d just like to give a plug to Sport England's website. We talked about activity and I have a couple of links to an NHS video exercise.

**Sarah Botterill:** Mark do you have questions that have come through that we can just briefly flag?

**Mark Walker:** Mostly they've been answered, I think. There's a, there's a question in here, which I think is actually, is my question to the RNIB. I think this is the sort of thing you help people with if somebody's having difficulty using their TV because the guide that the text on the guide isn't legible. And I think that's the sort of thing that's somebody can call you about, isn't it? And ask for help either to choose a service, you know, choose the TV before they buy it or just to get some help afterwards.

But also that's what I think Be My Eyes might be able to help you with, so Be My Eyes was mentioned earlier, is a service you can get on your phone, which is free an app that you can put it on your phone and then they could actually, um, you can point the camera at something and then they can explain what you're looking at.

So there's a couple of different ways of doing it, but I just thought I'd check in with Gary about, I think there's a sort of sort of answer that RNIB maybe to help with on the helpline.

**Alex Barker, AbilityNet:** I’ve has a question from someone who is 91 an is really struggling to get out for shopping. I googled his address and he came up as a resident in a housing scheme and I just wonder what support was available in sheltered housing?

**Alison Ingram, Age UK:** Thanks for that. That's really good question. At the moment, sheltered housing schemes are all doing their own thing, so it just depends on what resources they have and how in touch with their residents they are. So I'd hope that that gentleman might be able to get some help from the scheme that he's part of, but you did the right thing to get him to contact the GP because if the GP can give him some support to, you know, help/recognize that he needs additional help, that will, hopefully, will the supermarkets take some action. But it sounds like he's in a really difficult situation, but you know, if anyone is in that kind of crisis, please do feel free to give them a phone number for Age UK.

**Sarah Botterill:** And so our final slide, which is quite short, but important, which is just to thank everybody from the charities who have joined us today, all the different organizations. there's been some great advice, I think, and I think one of the things that the crisis has flagged up is just the number of people who are quite often isolated all the time.

It's great to see communities coming together. I think there's a lot of fantastic advice and technology not just at this time, but all the time, can help to connect people, connect us as charities to each other. Connect vulnerable people to the outside world.

And I hope we've done a little bit of that today for everybody. So do please watch out for the recording and we'll be sharing as many links in as much signposting.

We'll share as many links in as much detail as we can from everybody once the webinar finishes.

I'll just end there. Thanks ever so much everybody, and all take care.

**Mark Walker, AbilityNet:** Thank you Sarah for putting it together as well. It's been great.